

**CONTACT:**

**Plastics, Plastic Everywhere**

Have you ever noticed the triangular, chasing arrows symbol on the bottom of your yogurt container, salad dressing bottle, or milk jug? On the bottom of every plastic bottle, tub and container you'll find this recognized symbol of the recycling loop.

Despite limits on what you recycle now in your hometown program, nearly every plastic material is inherently recyclable. Once used, they can be reheated, reformed and used again. The question is, if they are recyclable, *where* can they be recycled?

Of the six plastics commonly used to make bottles and containers, there are widespread recycling opportunities for plastics coded 1 (PET) and 2 (HDPE). Together, these resins account for more than 94 percent of all plastic bottles made in the United States.

Beverage sales have experienced tremendous growth in the past 15 years. Despite the increase in population served by curbside recycling programs, recycling rates have plummeted. American consumers purchase over 500 million beverage bottles and cans on an average day – nearly 200 billion per year – but only one in three is recycled.

You want more discouraging news? The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency confirms that less than 6 percent of all plastics generated were recycled in 2005, and the material now accounts for about 16 percent of the trash sent to our landfills. Americans aren't recycling less plastic, but they're buying much more plastic, and less of it is going into recycling bins. Most of this increased consumption is non-carbonated beverages, mostly bottled water. In 1997, 3.3 billion bottles of water were sold. That number grew to over 26 *billion* in 2005, but only about 1 in 4 PET bottles (23.1%) were recycled.

The challenge of recycling plastic bottles today isn't a lack of available markets, but rather consumers' lack of interest in recycling those containers. Most states don't require a deposit for plastic bottles containing water, juice and other drinks. As a result, they're left behind, especially in public venues or workplaces that don't offer separated trash containers.

The easiest solution is to bring home the plastic and recycle it at home. On a larger scale, cities and towns need to implement "public space" recycling programs. Most people want to do the right thing and, given the opportunity, they would recycle their beverage bottles if there was a receptacle nearby. Boston implemented just such a program on the Boston Common and now

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collects enough bottles to fill a 700-gallon container each week. In just the first year of the program, the city has collected over 15 tons of material from the Common alone.

The potential for increased plastic container recycling is virtually limitless. What's needed is a commitment by each of us to make it happen.

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